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Editorial

EFFICIENCY IN CLASSICAL TEACHING

A Boston lawyer has been having fun with the railroad presidents in expounding to them the mysteries of the new profession, that of the "efficiency engineer," and telling them how they can convert their deficit into a surplus. Certainly what the efficiency engineer has accomplished is astonishing. But what if Lawyer Brandeis should proceed to apply his efficiency test to the work of the teachers? True, their results are less tangible, and they are measured by other standards than those of Mr. Brandeis' bricklayers and machinists, but definite results there are, and there are methods of testing them. Probably under such a scrutiny the classical teachers would fare as well as any of their colleagues and better than many; but such comparison forms a mean standard for any profession. The question for the classical teacher is whether he is working with definite aims and economy of effort, and whether his results are actually those that he himself and the public assume.

Any man must come from the reading of Paul Shorey's recent brilliant argument on "The Case of the Classics" (*School Review*, November, 1910) with a deepened sense of the opportunity and the obligation of the classical teacher. One of the most incisive of Professor Shorey's arguments is that in which he urges the scientist to realize that he ought to make common cause with the classicist. He says:

Whatever the grievances of the past, present attacks on the classics are inspired by the revolt against discipline and hard work, the impatience of all serious pre-vocational studies, the demand for quick utilitarian results, and absorption in the up-to-date. Our scientific colleagues who invoke these sentiments against us will find that they are playing with fire, and enlisting allies whom they cannot control. . . . The boy whom they have encouraged to shirk the discipline of Latin will find mathematics and physics still more irksome. The professional constituency of engineers and chemical experts they will retain. But the majority will go snap hunting in the happy fields

of English literature and the social sciences. Let not our scientific colleagues deceive themselves. They are more allied to us by the severity and definiteness of their discipline than divided by differences of matter and method.

Severity and definiteness of discipline are, then, according to Professor Shorey, distinguishing qualities common to classical and scientific studies. If that is true—and who will question its truth?—it behooves the classical teacher, quite in the spirit of the efficiency engineer, though with different methods and standards, to try to determine whether the discipline that his own students are receiving is definite and whether it is severe. The fact that it is classical does not guarantee either definiteness or severity. In fact the very richness and variety of the classical discipline make it peculiarly difficult after the first years to work toward definite ends. The teacher of science who is on a given day treating of chlorine or of alternating currents has at least definiteness of subject prescribed for him. Not so the classical teacher. Read Professor Shorey's delightful description of an hour in the classical lecture-room:

The good teacher will almost in the same breath translate a great poetic sentence, bring out its relations to the whole of which it is a part, make its musical rhythm felt by appropriate declamation, explain a historical or an antiquarian allusion, call attention to a dialectic form, put a question about a peculiar use of the optative, compare the imagery with similar figures of speech in ancient and modern poetry, and use the whole as a text for a little discourse on the difference between the classical and the modern or romantic spirit; so that you shall not know whether he is teaching science or art, language or literature, grammar, rhetoric, psychology, or sociology, because he is really teaching the elements and indispensable prerequisites of all.

If under such conditions definiteness of aim is difficult of attainment, it is equally true that classical studies do not of themselves insure severity of discipline. Professor Shorey would have the coming generation "set to gnaw the file of Latin grammar for a year or two." But a good many teachers of Latin and Greek are assuming that their pupils are gnawing the file when in fact they are sucking their thumbs. A bright young graduate gives in a volume of school reminiscences this suggestive memory of his own classical labors: "The love you feel for your chum, who puts his arm about your shoulders and says, 'Come on, old man, let's plug the Virgil; you read the trot and I'll work the original.'" If Professor Shorey's article shall not only confound the Philistines, but quicken the classical teachers themselves to a keener appreciation of their opportunities, and a more unsparing criticism of their own results, he will have done double service.